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## EIU Weather Center Provides Up-to-the-Minute Local Data Online

Mar-07-2006

Weather aficionados who like to keep an eye on the sky can now get in-depth local information, even in real-time, from Eastern Illinois University's new online Weather Center.

Using information gathered by a weather station perched above the EIU Physical Science Building, the EIU Weather Center – found online at [www.eiu.edu/~weather](http://www.eiu.edu/~weather) – lists a wide variety of data, from the basics such as current temperature, humidity and wind speed to more comprehensive statistics and archives.

The Web site also keeps visitors notified of any current weather watches and warnings, which could be particularly helpful at this time of year. In Illinois, March is Tornado Awareness Month, and March 5-11 is Severe Weather Awareness Week.

"I think it's important that the campus keeps informed of weather events," said Cameron Craig, the EIU geology/geography instructor who brought the EIU Weather Center to fruition. "It's a nice tool for students to use, and it ties campus to the community."

Craig started a similar project at Indiana State University, where he was a graduate director of the Climate Laboratory and now is pursuing his doctorate. The weather Web site there received about 6,000 hits a year, from as far away as South Korea, Russia, South Africa and Europe.

He came to EIU in 2005 with similar plans for a weather center here. All of his work on the project was done on a volunteer basis.

The digital weather station is affixed to the roof of the Physical Science Building. It was purchased for about \$2,000 by the EIU geology/geography department.

Previously, the closest weather station to Charleston was at the Coles County Memorial Airport on Illinois Route 16 between Charleston and Mattoon.

"What sets this apart from other stations is that all of the data is archived automatically and also streamed to the Internet," said John Stimac, acting chair of the EIU geology/geography department. "The instruments have been calibrated and meet all of the standards set forth by the National Weather Service."

The Weather Center helps students at both the introductory and advanced levels of course work, Stimac said, adding that it provides a hands-on method of learning that was previously not available.

Three broadcast meteorology students – Jeff Fell of Kansas, Kevin Jeanes of Naperville and Phil Norton of Charleston – use weather models to create broadcasts for the Web site four days a week.

"This gives them an immense advantage to students who never actually get to make a forecast until they are hired for their first job," Stimac said. "Their broadcasts are also archived so they may be used in portfolios."

A fourth student, Kelly Mull of Chatham, checks the data for accuracy, prepares spreadsheets, and works with Craig to create monthly climate summaries to post on the website.

The Web site went live in January, and it's already benefiting people on campus and beyond.

"Since the Weather Center is online, the current data and forecasts are available to everyone that has Internet access," Stimac said. "I know that some of the people in EIU Facilities Planning and Management use the Weather Center to help plan for daily projects. The data are also used by the National Weather Service, National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, and other weather agencies to make better forecast models. They can do this, since we help fill in gaps in their coverage."



*EIU instructor Cameron Craig stands with the weather station that is perched above the Physical Science Building.*

The department will continue its industry outreach efforts by partnering with the Coles County Emergency Management Agency to host a National Weather Service Storm Spotter Training Session at 6:30 p.m. March 23 in the Phipps Lecture Hall in the Physical Science Building. Those interested may e-mail Craig at [cdcraig@eiu.edu](mailto:cdcraig@eiu.edu).

In the near future, the EIU Weather Center is to offer online resources for teachers to use in their classrooms in the community.

In addition, students are working on a 30-minute documentary on the weather that will be available to schools as well as local-access cable channels, Craig said.

And a monthly newsletter, Illinois Skies, is being published online, giving readers weather-related feature stories and climate data. A print version is in the works.

"It's an all-around experience," Craig said.